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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001516

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2018
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [MASS](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS THE GAZA BORDER; RAFAH CROSSING
CLOSED, BORDER CALM

REF: A. CAIRO 1436
[B](#). CAIRO 1402
[C](#). CAIRO 1110

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey per 1.4 (b).

[1](#). (C) Summary: On a July 13 visit to the Egypt-Gaza border, the Ambassador attended a briefing by Liaison Agency with International Organizations (LAWIO) Chief MG Nagy and toured the border area. In the briefing, MG Nagy outlined the political and security reasons that he said compel Egypt to view the smuggling issue seriously, and listed the counter-smuggling steps the GOE is currently taking, such as procuring U.S. counter-tunneling equipment. He also described the difficulty of locating tunnel openings in Egyptian Rafah, and attributed increased smuggling attempts to Israeli border crossing closures. During a border tour, we observed that the Rafah crossing was closed, as LAWIO officers told us it has been since the last temporary opening July 3 (ref B). Traveling along the border, we saw that the vicinity was calm on both sides, and that the Kerem Shalom crossing remains shut. Hamas members manning outposts along the border were non-threatening. LAWIO officers showed us four areas where the GOE has discovered tunnel openings, some of which were in residential sections of Egyptian Rafah. End summary.

LAWIO Briefing

[2](#). (C) LAWIO Chief MG Nagy briefed the Ambassador on Egyptian counter-smuggling efforts on the border prior to guiding the Ambassador on a tour of the border. He reiterated the GOE claim that the tunnel openings are too narrow to smuggle certain types of weapons, including rockets, rifles and explosives. (Note: subsequently, we observed one tunnel 1.5 meters wide. End note.) Nagy commented that tunnel openings are sometimes difficult to locate as they are hidden inside houses and schools. MG Nagy outlined the negative impact of smuggling on Egypt's national security, saying that smuggling damages Egyptian-Israeli relations, fuels criminal gang activity in the Sinai, provides financing for terrorists in the Sinai, and increases tensions between local Bedouin and the GOE security forces. Nagy outlined the steps Egypt has taken to combat smuggling: establishing a legal framework for arresting and prosecuting smugglers, closely coordinating with Israel, and procuring counter-smuggling equipment from the U.S. (ref A). Nagy said that smuggling has increased since the 2005 Israeli disengagement due to Israel's economic measures against Gaza.

Border Tour

13. (C) During a tour of the border, we observed that the Rafah crossing was closed and locked. We did not see civilians on the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing. A senior LAWIO officer confirmed that the Rafah crossing has been closed since the last temporary opening July 3 (ref B). The officer said he had no knowledge of when the GOE would open Rafah again temporarily, speculating that such a decision would depend on the political and economic situation in Gaza, according to GOE assessments. Traveling south from the Rafah crossing to Kerem Shalom, the Palestinian side of the border appeared quiet, with only a few Palestinians walking and working in the area. The Kerem Shalom crossing was closed and empty; the only activity we observed consisted of Israel Defense Force (IDF) jeep patrols.

14. (C) Heading north from the Rafah crossing toward the Mediterranean Sea, the border area appeared calm. We observed several Hamas outposts, adorned with Palestinian flags, and manned by Hamas fighters. North of Border Stone 1 on the coast, we saw one Egyptian and one Israeli naval vessel patrolling their respective territorial waters. Approximately 10 Hamas members manned an outpost at Border Stone 1; they showed an interest in our presence and spoke excitedly with Egyptian Border Guard Force officials, but did not make any threatening moves. LAWIO officers took us to a BGF station on the third floor balcony of an abandoned building overlooking Gaza, about 600 meters south of Border

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Stone 4. We observed 3 Hamas members in a makeshift outpost on the Philadelphi Corridor. In the vicinity, we could see greenhouse frames that Palestinian workers have been constructing since at least late May (ref C). This residential section of Palestinian Rafah on the Philadelphi Corridor is marked by partially destroyed apartment buildings that LAWIO attributed to Israeli air strikes. Contrary to previous visits to the border, we did not observe IDF air force patrols overhead.

Tunnels

15. (C) First, LAWIO officers showed us an old tunnel opening about 15 meters from the Kerem Shalom crossing fence. LAWIO officers showed us tunnel digging implements and GPS equipment they said were found in the tunnel. Second, LAWIO showed us a new tunnel area discovered July 11, 1 kilometer south of Border Stone 4 and 150 meters west of the border, in a residential area down dusty alleys. In a yard behind an apartment building, we saw one 1.5 meter-wide tunnel next to an olive bush. About 15 meters further away from the apartment building was another 1.5 meter-wide tunnel opening with a wooden support structure. In an adjacent shed was a small opening to ventilate the tunnel. The third tunnel area we visited was between border stones 4 and 5, also in a residential neighborhood down alleyways, about 150 meters west of the border. LAWIO officers showed us an opening to an apparent feeder tunnel running parallel to the border, 1 meter wide, that was outfitted with floodlights at the tunnel mouth. LAWIO told us they discovered this tunnel July 10. Finally, in an empty field 1700 meters north of Border Stone 5 and 450 meters west of the border, LAWIO showed us a 1 meter-wide tunnel opening.

SCOBAY